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# PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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**Follow-up report on the Evaluation of FAO's COVID-19 Response and  
Recovery Programme**

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme (RRP) was launched in July 2020 as a response to the global pandemic with the aim to enhance coordination of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' (FAO) response to the COVID-19 crisis and its related resource mobilization. It was conceived as an “umbrella programme”, including a range of initiatives, projects and activities related to FAO’s response across seven priority areas ranging from humanitarian response to long-term resilience building and recovery as well as agrifood systems transformation.
- The real time evaluation of this programme was conducted over two consecutive phases. The interim report (Phase 1) was presented at the 132nd Session of the Programme Committee in November 2021 (Document [PC 132/7](#)) including Management Observations (Document [PC 132/7 Sup.1](#)) to the good practices and lessons learned presented for further consideration.
- The final report (Phase 2) of the real-time evaluation of the programme was submitted to the 134th Session of the Programme Committee in November 2022 (Document [PC 134/5](#)). The final report assessed the contributions of FAO’s COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme to a more relevant and timely response at country level.
- The final report also reviewed the extent to which the RRP promoted collaboration, normative values and supported business continuity, and it was accompanied by a Management Response (Document [PC 134/5 Sup.1](#)).
- The purpose of this document is to report on the actions and initiatives taken as follow-up to the evaluation.

### GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

- The Programme Committee is invited to review the content of the document and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.

## I. Background

1. The COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme (RRP), with operational requirements of USD 1.32 billion was launched in July 2020 as a response to the global pandemic with the aim to enhance coordination of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' (FAO) response to the COVID-19 crisis and its resource mobilization efforts. It was designed as an “umbrella programme”, including a range of initiatives, projects and activities across seven priorities related to FAO mandate:

- 1) **Global Humanitarian Response Plan.** Addressing the impacts of COVID-19 and safeguarding livelihoods in food-crisis contexts;
- 2) **Data for Decision-making.** Ensuring quality data and analysis for effective policy support to food-systems and Zero Hunger;
- 3) **Economic Inclusion and Social Protection to Reduce Poverty.** Pro-poor COVID-19 responses for an inclusive post-pandemic economic recovery;
- 4) **Trade and Food Safety Standards.** Facilitating and accelerating food and agricultural trade during COVID-19 and beyond;
- 5) **Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery.** Protecting the most vulnerable, promoting economic recovery and enhancing risk management capacities;
- 6) **Preventing the Next Zoonotic Pandemic.** Strengthening and extending the One Health approach to avert animal-origin pandemics; and
- 7) **Food Systems Transformation.** “Building to transform” during response and recovery.

2. As of the closure of the programme on 30 June 2024, the programme mobilized USD **694 450 640** across the seven pillars.

3. The RRP carried out immediate-, medium- and longer-term actions to prevent the health crisis from becoming a food crisis. The programme mitigated the immediate impacts and strengthened the longer-term resilience of livelihoods, moving towards a green recovery, and building to transform agrifood systems.

4. FAO's response to the COVID-19 pandemic is evidence of the organization's strong convening power, provision of real-time assistance, data and evidence-based analysis, early warning systems and technical and policy expertise to direct support to its Members where and when it is most needed.

5. The real-time evaluation of this programme was conducted over two consecutive phases. The interim report of the Phase 1 of the evaluation<sup>1</sup> was presented at the 132nd Session of the Programme Committee in November 2021.

6. This interim report of the real-time evaluation identified good practices and lessons learned emerging from programme implementation, specific to the humanitarian response and the provision of knowledge products and data services in support of recovery efforts within the COVID-19 pandemic context. It advised that the identified good practices and lessons learned be considered when appropriate, by Management, and for future similar crises.

7. The final evaluation, accompanied by a Management Response<sup>2</sup>, was presented at the 134th Session of the Programme Committee in November 2022 and assessed the contributions of the RRP (Phase 2) to a more relevant and timely response at country level. It also reviewed the extent to which the RRP promoted collaboration, normative values and supported business continuity.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/3c9da3c8-cd54-4b44-8283-2f84178c34d8/content>

<sup>2</sup> <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/53055d9b-d477-48be-bb30-e151d69009da/content>

## II. Overall progress in the implementation of the recommendations

8. The RRP was closed at the end of June 2024 in terms of acceptance of new projects under the Umbrella Programme, while taking into consideration the committed timeline of the ongoing projects, ensuring that these projects are successfully implemented and finalized.

9. Learning from this Umbrella Programme, the innovative mechanism for fast-track project and programme approval that was adopted for timely response and rapid implementation will remain critical for the Organization's delivery of results at scale at country level.

10. The strategic direction and goals set by FAO Leadership at the outbreak of the global pandemic, concerning knowledge products, services regarding data collection, dissemination, evidence-based analytical work, dynamic and participatory process which was possible through a virtual platform setup in 2020 are key elements that will remain critical for advancing FAO's support with or without a global crisis to its Members.

11. FAO continues to invest in further advancing the Geospatial Platform and the Data Lab and has been a recognized global actor among agrifood sectors. Both the Geospatial Platform and the Data Lab are constantly used for immediate response and targeted interventions.

12. FAO's approach under the Programme through the two important pillars of humanitarian response and resilience building has been highly effective. It has secured critical humanitarian operations, from anticipatory actions, safeguarding livelihoods, protecting critical food supply chains to ensuring production. The combination of the anticipatory actions for COVID-19, with other shocks e.g., drought, and the corresponding use of the Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture (GIEWS), provided for a more holistic response for countries and communities facing multiple risks and stresses.

13. Another important element beyond the scope of the programme is the Food Import Financing Facility (FIFF) which was proposed by FAO to support countries with the soaring costs of food imports and improve access to food at country level. FIFF covers 62 countries with a total population of 1.78 billion people and had been provided the opportunity for the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to approve a Food Shock Window providing access to emergency financing for countries facing balance-of-payment problems related to the global food crisis. FAO continues to provide technical assistance for the implementation of this instrument.

14. Further examples of work that were strengthened, with longer-term impacts, related to enhancing food market transparency, market intelligence, early warning, and informed policy responses. FAO has provided timely and objective data and information on market developments and outlooks. These included regular reporting on food commodity prices through the monthly FAO Food Price Index and the Food Price Monitoring and Analysis (FPMA) Bulletin. As well as the publication of the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) Market Monitor, providing a synopsis of major market developments for wheat, maize, rice and soybeans, and the publication of Food Outlook. The Food Outlook presents a comprehensive assessment of food commodity markets, and the Crop Prospects and Food Situation report, providing an analysis of the food situation and food security conditions by geographic region, by the Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture (GIEWS). Furthermore, FAO continued to provide a series of briefs and information notes, including assessments of impacts on global agrifood markets and food security.

15. With regard to the three recommendations provided by the Evaluation Report, below is an update on progress.

***Recommendation 1: Members and Management should consider how to best address funding shortfalls to avoid uneven distribution of resources required in future or similar programmes.***

16. **Progress:** Management is fully committed to address funding shortfalls and reached USD 694 450 640 across the seven pillars by end of June 2024. Few pillars faced difficulty reaching their targets, namely data and statistics as well as trade and food safety standards, for which efforts have been made to identify and access new and innovative funding sources.

**Recommendation 2:** *Management should consider the application of fast-track procurement procedures for future similar situations and further improve timeliness in procurement processes through the support provided to country offices by International Procurement Officers.*

17. **Progress:** In collaboration with Office of Emergencies and Resilience (OER), Procurement Services (CSLP) is reviewing the fast-track procurement procedures to identify areas for further improvement. Additionally, an International Procurement Officer surge support mechanism has been established to meet urgent needs and strengthen procurement capacity during Level 3 Scale-Up Emergency responses.

**Recommendation 3:** *Management should ensure that business continuity plans are updated and owned by country offices, and that sufficient human and financial resources for their implementation are available.*

18. **Progress:** The Organization, having drawn from the best practices of the United Nations entities and lessons learned during the global pandemic, has launched the overarching policy on Organizational Resilience Management System (ORMS)<sup>3</sup>. Manual Section 114 (MS114) – ORMS and relevant guidelines for eight core elements, including Business Continuity Management, were launched at the end of 2022. The ORMS Structure, with clear roles and responsibilities, along with an internal ORMS Network was established in 2022, to serve as a community of practice.

19. A Business Continuity Planning Tool and Progress Reporting Dashboard were launched at the end of December 2023. The Key Performance Indicator (**KPI10.3.F – Percentage of country offices with up-to-date Business Continuity Plan**) of the Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) 2022-23 indicated that 97 percent of plan owners completed their Business Continuity Plans in 2022-23. The progress, challenges and risks were reported under Output 3 of the Functional Objective 10.3. Developing the Business Continuity Plan (BCP) and the shift to a more robust system from the legacy approach, is seen as a step forward, however the actual actions surrounding the maintenance, exercise and review (ME&R) of BCPs requires urgent attention.

20. Efforts have been made, within limited resources, to raise awareness of Business Continuity Management (BCM) through briefing sessions, inclusion of specific control points in the Internal Controls Questionnaire and the Country Annual Report. To nudge behavior change, alerts have been activated in the BCP module, and the Integrated Management Information System (iMIS) reporting dashboard launched. Nevertheless, by the end of August 2024, only 14 BCPs have been exercised, whilst only one (Bangladesh) was activated in response to the actual crises.

21. For strengthened accountability, and ensuring the business continuity is owned by the respective offices, divisions and country offices, the revised key performance indicator (KPI) was introduced in the PWB 2024-25. The revised Key Performance Indicator (**KPI 10.3.F Percentage of the offices exercised the Business Continuity Plans**), requires that BCPs are exercised/tested (walkthrough, table talk exercise, or activated to the real incident) in line with the BCM guidelines.

22. There is a need to ensure adequate resources are allocated to the policy owner (CSL) for establishment of a permanent structure for ORMS support. Efforts are underway to ensure CSL has access to resources (financial and human) towards implementation of the MS114 thus enabling effective Business Continuity Management and support the Decentralized Offices to continue delivering the FAO mandate during the crises.

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<sup>3</sup> ORMS Handbook Page

Evaluation Recommendation (a)	Sub-recommendation	actions agreed in the management response (b)	Description of actions taken, or reasons for actions not taken I	MAR score (d) <sup>4</sup>	Impact of, or changes resulted from taken actions I
<p><b>Recommendation 1:</b> Members and Management should consider how to best address funding shortfalls to avoid uneven distribution of resources required in future or similar programmes.</p>	NA	Management is committed to address funding shortfalls and to provide information to Members and partners with regard to priority areas with limited resources in order to ensure required funding is mobilized and allocated.	Management is fully committed to address funding shortfalls and reached USD 694 450 640 across the seven pillars by end of June 2024. Few pillars faced difficulty reaching their targets namely data and statistics as well as trade and food safety standards for which efforts have been made while new and innovative funding sources considered.	5	Actions have been taken by the Organization to balance the discrepancies in terms of funding among the different pillars, for instance by strengthening few key areas with lower level of funding such as data and information.
<p><b>Recommendation 2:</b> Management should consider the application of fast-track procurement procedures for future similar situations and further improve timeliness in procurement processes through the support provided to country offices by International Procurement Officers.</p>	NA	Management agrees that fast tracked procurement should be applied to similar situations to improve and accelerate the Organization's response and assistance, and committed to prepare such procedures in view of the possibility of another crisis.	In collaboration with OER, CSLP is reviewing the fast-track procurement procedures to identify areas for further improvement. Additionally, an International Procurement Officer surge support mechanism has been established to meet urgent needs and strengthen procurement capacity during Level 3 Scale-Up Emergency responses.	4	Actions for fast-track procurement procedure with focus on areas for improvement have been taken.

<sup>4</sup> **Management Action Record (MAR) Score:** 1 - **None:** no action was taken to implement the recommendation; 2 - **Poor:** plan and actions for implementation of the recommendation are at a very preliminary stage; 3 - **Inadequate:** implementation of the recommendation is uneven and partial; 4 - **Adequate:** implementation of the recommendation has progressed; there is no evidence yet of its results on the intended target; 5 - **Good:** the recommendation has been fully implemented and there is some initial evidence of its impact on the intended target; 6 – **Excellent:** there is solid evidence that the recommendation has had a positive impact on its intended target.

Evaluation Recommendation (a)	Sub-recommendation	actions agreed in the management response (b)	Description of actions taken, or reasons for actions not taken I	MAR score (d) <sup>4</sup>	Impact of, or changes resulted from taken actions I
<p><b>Recommendation 3:</b> Management should ensure that business continuity plans are updated and owned by country offices, and that sufficient human and financial resources for their implementation are available.</p>	<p>NA</p>	<p>Management agrees that the update of business continuity plans should be ensured and, depending on the availability of funds and relevant human resources, will pursue implementation of this recommendation</p>	<p>The Organization, having drawn from the best practices of the United Nations entities and lessons harvested during the global pandemic, has launched the overarching policy on ORMS. Manual Section 114 – ORMS and relevant guidelines for eight core elements, including Business Continuity Management, were launched at the end of 2022. ORMS Structure with clear roles and responsibilities, along with an internal ORMS Network was established in 2022, to serve as a community of practice. Business continuity planning tool and progress reporting dashboard were launched, at the end of December 2023, the Key Performance Indicator (<i>KPII0.3.F – Percentage of country offices with up-to-date Business Continuity Plan</i>) of the PWB 2022-23 was fully as 97 percent of plan owners completed their Business Continuity Plans. The progress, challenges and risks were</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>Necessary actions are in progress but it is too early to report on the feedback of the policy, guidelines and systems launched.</p>

Evaluation Recommendation (a)	Sub-recommendation	actions agreed in the management response (b)	Description of actions taken, or reasons for actions not taken I	MAR score (d) <sup>4</sup>	Impact of, or changes resulted from taken actions I
			reported under Output 3 of the Functional Objective 10.3. Developing the business continuity plan and shift to the robust system from the legacy approach, is seen as a step forward, however the actual actions surrounding the maintenance, exercise and review (ME&R) of BCPs requires urgent attention.		